A WESTMINSTER BIBLIOGRAPHY PART SEVEN & EIGHT

From The Editor

This double issue is the final installment of Westminster Bibliography, which includes Pastor Bacon's Conclusion and Bibliography in addition to parts seven and eight. With some sadness we also take this occasion to announce that this is the last Blue Banner as those of you who've been receiving have come to know it. Beginning in 1997 The Blue Banner will go through some changes. We are going to reduce the mailing to four times a year. Content-wise it will include information on material available from Blue Banner Ministries (catalog listings, etc.) and shorter articles and extracts rather than the lengthier articles we've been publishing. We are in the process of changing and updating our World Wide Web page to be our focus of distribution of our longer material. In my humble opinion, The Blue Banner newsletter has done an excellent job these last four or five years of getting information "out" that we believed the church needs to hear. However, the mailing and printing costs have grown considerably, while at the same time Web access and the costs of having a Web "presence" has plummeted. For the cost of producing one of our longer newsletters we can have a year's worth of presence on the Web offering literally a hundred times more material. We will still be making the material available in printed form, but as individual publications available for order, rather than reproducing it at length in the newsletter. From the Pastor and folks at FPCR, I do thank you for the support you've given the newsletter over the years and hope you will continue to support Blue Banner Ministries as we go through these changes.

7 THE FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

At the same time the Assembly was composing the *Directory* the struggle continued between the Presbyterians and the Independents in the Assembly. Still, the following propositions received unanimous support early on:

1. Christ hath instituted a Government, and Governors Ecclesiastical in the Church.

2. Christ hath furnished some in his Church with gifts of government and with commission to exercise the same when called thereto.

3. It is agreeable to and warranted by the Word of God, that some others beside ministers of the Word should join with them in the Government of the Church.

The question of whether the government of the church should be in the hands of an eldership *per se* was discussed extensively. The question was whether there should be elders in every congregation by divine right [*jus divinum*]. The Assembly neither accepted nor rejected the "Presbyter" theory of the ruling elder. Some in the Assembly believed that the church governors should be considered not as presbyters in the New Testament sense of the word, but simply as *seniores plebis* as in the African Church, representatives or "lay helpers" to aid the presbyters (pastors) in ruling. Thus the Assembly voted not to use I Timothy 5:17 as a proof text for the office, settling for only Romans 12:7-8 and I Corinthians 12:28 as New Testament proofs for the office.

However, it was on the subject of the ordination of church officers that the divisions began showing up with regularity. Parliament was concerned that arrangements be made as soon as possible for the examination,

ordination and installation of men into vacant charges throughout the country. On January 9, 1643/44, the Assembly's Committee reported with respect to ordination, "we humbly conceive that the preaching presbyters are only to ordain."[1] The Independents would not allow that statement to pass unchallenged as it was opposed to their most fundamental proposition: that all authority — and therefore the authority to ordain — was derived from Christ through the particular congregation. They kept up the struggle over that single phrase until April 19th. Quoting W. M. Hetherington:

> "The conduct of the Independents, on this occasion, was both discreditable in itself, and led to very pernicious results. It was discreditable either to their candour or their talents, to produce propositions couched in such ambiguous language, much more calculated to perplex than to clear the subject; and as they were men of decided abilities, the accusation falls upon their character, and constrains us to regard them as uncandid and disingenuous. But finding that they had succeeded so ill in their attempt to deceive or confuse in this instance, they never again could be prevailed upon to state to the Assembly their own opinions in writing, though sufficiently pertinacious in retaining them, and supporting them by every kind of argument. The new course of tactics thus adopted proved the means of retarding the Assembly beyond measure, and ended at last in rendering all its prolonged toils comparatively abortive."[2]

The Assembly proceeded to settle the doctrinal portion of ordination in a way adverse to the Independents. The rules then followed the doctrine. However, the Assembly took care to state carefully that no minister should be forced upon a parish if the congregation were unwilling to have him. The charge that is sometimes made against the Assembly (by John Milton and others) that "presbyter is but priest writ large," does not stand up to scrutiny. The Assembly left the final word of whether a minister could be settled in a parish in the hands of the congregation.

During the debates over ordination the five "Dissenting Brethren,"[3] seeing that the votes in the Assembly were going against them, addressed themselves directly to Parliament by publishing their treatise, "*An Apologetical Narration* humbly submitted to the Honourable Houses of Parliament." The publication of a paper dissenting from the Assembly before the Assembly reported to Parliament was a breach of etiquette that brought on fierce discussions and accusations not only in the Assembly itself, but in Parliament and the press as well.[4]

The doctrinal portion of the *Directory for Ordination*

was sent up to Parliament on April 19, 1644. But, especially in the House of Commons, such petty suspicions and party spirit prevailed that it was not formally sanctioned until October 2, 1644, nearly six months later. Meanwhile, as Parliament haggled over the *Directory for Ordination,* the Assembly continued its struggles over the proposition that had been tabled since February 6, "that the Scripture holdeth forth that many particular Congregations may be under one Presbyterian Government."

Additionally, since the Independents had 'gone public' with the *Apologetical Narration*, the Presbyterians began publishing pamphlets in earnest. One estimate claims that during the decade of the 1640's over 30,000 pamphlets on the subject of church government were published in the city of London.[5] The gentlest and most conciliatory pamphlet was Charles Herle's *Independency upon Scripture of the Independency of Churches.* Herle later became Prolocutor (Moderator) of the Assembly after Dr. Twisse. The most elaborate and least gracious was Thomas Edwards' *Antapologia.* Edwards' words were so strong that it seems he suffers as much from a party spirit as do those he accuses. Later productions on the subject of Independency included Dr. Bastwick's *Independency Not God's Ordinance* (1645) and *The Utter Routing of the Whole Army of Independents and Sectaries* (1646) and Edwards' later work *Gangræna,* in three parts (1646).

The divisions over the subject of the authority of the presbytery caused the Assembly still further delays due to a desire on the part of the Presbyterian majority to accommodate the Independents as far as possible. It therefore took the Assembly until July 4, 1645, to send up the *Draft of Church Government* to Parliament. Though the Presbyterians carried the day in the Assembly, the Independents won the day from a practical point of view. The prolonged delay effected by the Independents proved to be the first fatal blow to the successful establishment of the Presbyterian Church system in England. The non-establishment of a church system was materially the same as the establishment of Independency.

At one point the Presbyterians and Independents were on the very verge of accommodation. Philip Nye and Thomas Goodwin, leaders of the Independents, were constrained to admit that the keys of *doctrine* at least are in the hands of a Synodical Assembly; and on March 14th the Committee of Accommodation reported that the Independents had agreed to the following propositions:

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[1] *Hetherington*, 172.

[2] *Ibid,* 174.

[3] Thomas Goodwin, Jeremiah Burroughs, Philip Nye, William Bridge and Sidrach Simpson

[4] *Hetherington,* 181-182

[5] A. H. Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England: Their Rise, Decline and Revival.* (London: Publication Committee of the Presbyterian Church of England, 1889), 264.

1.That there be a Presbytery, or meeting of the Elders of many neighboring congregations, to consult upon such things as concern those congregations in matters Ecclesiastical; and such presbyteries are the ordinances of Christ, having His power and authority [or alternate reading in Gillespie is "authority and power from him"].

2.Such presbyteries have power, in cases that are to come before them, to declare and determine doctrinally what is agreeable to God's Word; and this judgment of theirs is to be received with reverence and obligation as Christ's ordinance.

3.They have power to require the Elders of those congregations to give an account of anything scandalous in doctrine or practice.

On the nineteenth of March it was further agreed by the Independents in the Committee of Accommodation:

4.The churches and eldership being offended, let them examine, admonish, and, in the case of obstinacy, declare them either disturbers of the peace, subverters of the faith, or otherwise as the nature and degree of the offense shall require.

5.In case that particular church or eldership shall refuse to reform that scandalous doctrine or practice, then that meeting of elders, which is assembled from several congregations, shall acquaint their several congregations respectively, and withdraw from them, denying church communion and fellowship with them.[6]

The proposition to which the Independents simply could not agree was the proposition which carried in the Assembly by a mere eight votes, "that no single congregation which may conveniently join together in an association, may assume unto itself all and sole power of ordination." The discussions concerning this and similar propositions were carried on in the Westminster Assembly during 1644 and 1645 by a series of papers on both sides, afterward collected and published by order of Parliament by Adoniram Byfield, one of the Scribes, as *The Grand Debate*.[7] Before Parliament finally accepted the Presbyterian plan, however, another complication arose... that of the Erastian Controversy. [This material was covered in Westminster Bibliography Part Three, Review of *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici*, v4 #11-12].

8. THE CONFESSION OF FAITH

The Westminster divines were far from being absorbed merely in polemic or even casuistic debates. Much arduous labor was peacefully and quietly carried on in committees and during protracted sessions. The Westminster *Confession* and *Catechisms* are monuments to the learned deliberations that took place both in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey and in the three committees of the Assembly.

As Dr. B. B. Warfield stated, "The amount of time consumed directly on the preparation of the *Confession of Faith* was certainly very great. But even this does not completely represent the pains expended on this task."[8]

The *Confession* and *Catechisms* were written by the ablest English speaking divines of the seventeenth century. The first nineteen chapters of the *Confession* were finished by September 25, 1646[9] and the entire *Confession* was presented to Parliament on November 26 of the same year.[10] The Scripture proofs for the *Confession* were finished and then the reconstituted committees were tasked with preparing a *Larger Catechism*. The *Larger Catechism* was essentially completed by October 15, 1647 in substantially the same shape we have it today.[11] The *Larger Catechism* was sent to both Houses of Parliament the following week[12] and on Monday, October 25, 1647, the Prolocutor reported that the *Catechism* was delivered.[13] Preparation of the *Shorter Catechism* began on October 19, 1647, by Samuel Ward, Stephen Marshall and Anthony Tuckney.[14] The *Shorter Catechism,* without Scripture proofs, was sent to Parliament on November 25, 1647,[15] with the proofs being sent up April 14, 1648.[16] The House of Commons the same day ordered 600 copies to be printed for "use of the Assembly and 2 Houses."[17] Professor Alexander Mitchell rightly wrote of the *Shorter Catechism,*

"...it may be regarded as, in several respects, the most remarkable of their symbolical books, the matured fruit of all their consultations and debates, the quintessence of that system of truth in which they desired to train English-speaking youth, and faithful training in which, I believe, has done more on both sides of the Atlantic to keep alive reverence for the old theology than all other human instrumentalities whatever."[18]

[6] *Lightfoot,* 214-215; *Hetherington,* 202; *Gillespie,* 40-41,

[7] *The Grand Debate* will be discussed in some detail in an upcoming dissertation expanding upon this thesis.

[8] *Warfield,* 76.

[9] *Minutes,* 290.

[10] *Ibid.,* 303.

[11] *Ibid.,* 484.

[12] *Ibid.,* 485.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Ibid.,* 491-92.

[16] *Ibid.,* 510-11.

[17] *Ibid.,* 511.

[18] Alexander F. Mitchell, *Catechisms of the Second Reformation.* (London: James Nisbet, 1886), p. ix. Hereafter *Catechisms.*

The first task to occupy the Assembly was the revision of the Thirty-nine Articles.[19] However, that work was never finished. The first fifteen articles were thoroughly debated, however, and much of the debate must have influenced later deliberations on the *Confession.*[20] Many of the topics treated in various portions of the *Confession* were also covered in the debates concerning the *Form of Presbyterial Government* and the *Directory for Public Worship.*[21] For example, in the *Minutes* for May 6, 1645 — before any part of the *Confession* came before the Assembly — there is a note, "Debate whether to bring this under the head of government of a Confession of Faith."[22] The proposition which was debated on that occasion was later incorporated in substance into the *Confession* at §23.3. By the same token, the long debates on the divine right of church government must have been fruitful not only for the *Form of Government* but also for such chapters of the *Confession* as "The Church and Church Censures."

It is becoming increasingly common to hear candidates for the ministry in the PCA's presbyteries muse about the likelihood (or rather the unlikelihood) of such a far reaching document as the *Confession of Faith* containing no errors. By April 12, 1644, there were 90 members of the Assembly who were still regarded as being on the roll. Those 90 men were not merely recent graduates of mediocre seminaries, but 90 of the best theological minds in the English speaking world.[23] Further, each of them had taken a vow to "maintain nothing in point of doctrine but what I believe to be most agreeable to the Word of God."[24] Robert Baillie's description of the Assembly included the following remarks:

> "Every Committee, as the Parliament gives order in wryte to take any purpose to consideration, takes a portion, and in their afternoon meeting prepares matters for the Assemblie, setts downe their minde in distinct propositions, backs their propositions with texts of Scripture. After the prayer, Mr. Byfield, the scribe, reads the proposition and Scriptures, where upon the Assemblie debates in a most grave and orderlie way. No man is called up to speak; bot who stands up of his own accord, he speaks so long as he will without interruption. If two or three stand up at once, then the divines confusedlie calls

on his name whom they desyre to hear first: On whom the loudest and manifest voices call, he speaks. No man speaks to any bot to the Proloqutor. They harangue long and very learnedlie. They studie the questions well before hand, and prepares their speeches; but withall the mean are exceeding prompt, and well spoken. I doe marvell at the very accurate and extemporall replyes that many of them usuallie doe make. When, upon every proposition by itself, and on everie text of Scripture that is brought to confirme it, every man who will hes said his whole minde, and the replyes, and duplies, and triplied, and heard; then the most part calls, To the question."[25]

Of course it is possible that fallible men produced a document that does not accurately reflect the mind of Christ at some point or other. We do not claim that the Westminster divines were borne along by the Holy Spirit in the same way as were the authors of Scripture.[26] However, when comparing the likelihood of 90 of the most learned and godly men in England (plus the Commissioners from Scotland) making a theological error compared to the likelihood of a recent seminary graduate being in error, the *onus probandi* certainly seems to fall upon the person taking exception to the most learned and longest deliberating synod ever called in the history of the church. The Assembly taught in its *Confession of Faith,* "All synods or councils since the Apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as an help in both."[27] It is therefore evident that the Assembly did not intend their documents, including the *Confession,* to be made the rule of faith or practice. The Scriptures alone have that status.[28]

The courts of the PCA, therefore, should not be understood as adding a new rule to that of Scripture by means of their ministerial vows to receive and adopt the *Confession* and *Catechisms*. If the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and associated documents have any authority, it is because they reflect the mind of Christ as it is revealed in Scripture. If any proposition within the *Confession* does not reflect the mind of Christ, then it should be removed from the *Confession*. On the other hand, once men have taken an oath (or vow) they must keep it to the extent that it is for "what is good and just, and what he believeth so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform."[29]

As the lengthy quotation from Robert Baillie demonstrates, the Assembly regarded the *Confession* and *Catechisms* to consist of distinct propositions which were

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[19] *Hetherington,* 122.

[20] The first two folio volumes of the Manuscript minutes, which included the period of the revision of the Thirty-nine Articles have never been published. I was able to obtain a microfilm copy of E. Maunde Thompson's handwritten copies. The microfilm consists of 2,331 frames on four reels of film. A supposed description of the MS minutes is contained in *Hetherington,* but he mistakenly thought Byfield's MS minutes were Goodwin's journals. Professor Mitchell more accurately described the MS minutes in the Preface to his *Minutes,* v-x.

[21] See *Supra,* Chapters 7 and 6 respectively.

[22] *Minutes,* 89.

[23] *Minutes,* lxxxv.

[24] *Ibid.,* lxxx.

[25] *Baillie,* II, 107-109, cited *Ibid*.

[26] II Peter 1:21

[27] *WCF,* XXXI:iv.

[28] *WCF,* I:ii.

[29] *WCF,* XXII:iii.

capable of debate and subject to verification or falsification from Scripture. When the propositions were ready to be perfected they were remitted to a committee and subsequently debated in their new form. The Assembly did not simply give automatic approval to every proposition that came from committee. The *Confession of Faith* does not consist of a vague, undefined, or equivocal system, but a series of propositions under thirty-three heads, any of which is subject to verification or falsification from Scripture alone.

By way of example, the *Confession* contains the proposition, "The man may not marry any of his wife's kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own, nor the woman of her husband's kindred nearer in blood than of her own."[30] The proposition may be divided so that it consists of two propositions: one about the man and another about the woman. However, whether the proposition is divided or not, it contains a truth claim. The Westminster divines claimed that it is the mind of Christ that a man may not marry his [dead] wife's sister, mother, etc. They made the same statement regarding a widow: she may not marry her [dead] husband's father, brother, etc.

For the purpose of this example we will suppose that a candidate for ordination disagrees with the truth of this proposition. He is bound by even the most simple understanding of the ninth commandment to notify the court of jurisdiction of his disagreement. The court is then free to take any of several different courses of action as it sees fit — even to the extreme of sending up an overture to General Assembly to amend the *Confession* in such a way as to remove the (supposedly) untrue proposition.

Throughout such a procedure as that outlined above it would be totally unnecessary for anyone to appeal to the fallibility of the divines at Westminster. The only issue is the agreement or disagreement of a particular candidate with the truthfulness of a particular proposition in the *Confession.* While modern existentialists and phenomenologists speak (or rather claim to speak) of non-propositional truth, it is clear from a study of the Westminster Assembly that the divines who met in the Jerusalem chamber did not agree that any such truth exists — and they certainly would not agree that any non-propositional truth could contradict the propositions of Scripture.

The composition of a new *Confession of Faith* was a quarter of the task that befell the Assembly through the requirements of the *Solemn League and Covenant.* The *Solemn League* required the Parliament to bring "the

Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of *Church* government, directory for worship and catechising."[31] The Kirk of Scotland had previously determined to write a new confession, but decided to wait and see first what the English would do. With the passage of the *Solemn League* and arrival of the Scottish Commissioners, it was determined that the Assembly should begin a confession of faith *de novo* rather than continuing the revision of the Thirty-nine Articles.[32]

The first actual movement toward the composition seems to have been on August 14, 1644, when Sir Archibald Johnston, Lord Warriston, arrived from Scotland with a letter from the General Assembly emphasizing "the general desire of all the nation of Scotland for the hastening of the work in hand." John Lightfoot added, "Mr. Henderson also spoke to the same purpose of forwarding and hastening our work. Where upon it was ordered, that the grand committee should meet tomorrow."[33] The report from the Grand Committee came in on August 20, and contained a resolution for "a committee to join with the commissioners of Scotland, to draw up a confession of faith."[34] This will subsequently be called "the August 20th committee."[35] Two weeks later, on September 4, the Committee was augmented with ten more men, bringing the total on the Committee to nineteen.[36] However, it was not until the following summer that any part of the *Confession* came to the floor of the Assembly for a vote, though there were apparently some debates in April of 1645.[37]

Meanwhile the House of Commons was debating what should be defined as a "competent measure of understanding" for determing the particulars of ignorance and scandal in reference to the Lord's Supper. Communications passing from the House to the Assembly covered such doctrines as "concerning God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost," "concerning the state of man by creation, and by his fall," etc. On April 17, 1645, the House voted to desire the Assembly with all convenient speed to resolve upon a confession of faith for

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[30] *WCF*, XXIV:iv.

[31] *Confession,* 359.

[32] Mitchell, *Westminster Assembly*, 185.

[33] *Lightfoot,* 303.

[34] *Ibid.,* 305.

[35] See *Minutes,* lxxxvi-lxxxvii. Which committee(s) for the confession are intended gets somewhat confusing at several points.

[36] *Minutes,* lxxxvii. The nineteen were Dr. Gouge, Mr. Gataker, Mr. Arrowsmith, Dr. Temple, Mr. Burroughs, Mr. Burges, Mr. Vines, Mr. Goodwin, Dr. Hoyle, Mr. Palmer, Mr. Newcomen, Mr. Herle, Mr. Reynolds, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Tuckney, Dr. Smith, Mr. Young, Mr. Ley, and Mr. Sedgwicke.

[37] *Baillie,* II, 266, 275.

the Church of England and present it to the House.[38] The Scottish commissioners carried a letter from the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland to Parliament on April 14 that requested a speedy resolution of church government.[39] It must surely have brought as much pressure upon Parliament as did the debates over ignorance and scandal. Thus on April 21 a Committee for Confession of Faith was appointed to meet, likely for the first time, on April 23, 1645.[40]

No more appears in the *Minutes* until May 9, 1645. On that date it was ordered, "that the Assembly consider on Monday morning the best way to expedite the Confession of Faith, ... and that the two Committees for the Confession of Faith be put into one."[41] It seems that at some point between April 21, when the Committee for the Confession of Faith was ordered to meet two days later and May 9, 1645, when two committees were combined, a second committee must have been formed with no mention of it being made in the *Minutes*. Shaw supposed the August 20 committee to have been subdivided at some point and then reunited on May 9 of the following year.[42] However, it seems just as likely that the original August 20th committee consisting of nine members had met separately from the ten *new members* which were added as augmentation on September 4. Thus the scribe could write on April 21 as if there were only one committee (viewing the August 20 - September 4 as a single "augmented unit") and yet write on May 9 as though the two separate [sub]committees were [re]combined. There is no way of knowing for sure, but the explanation here offered seems as likely as Shaw's. Much more could be said regarding the various committees referenced in the *Minutes,* but it does not concern us at this point.[43]

It would seem that the Assembly itself tired of multiplying committees, for the minutes of September 18, 1646, read, "Upon a motion to appoint a Committee to consider of the Confession of Faith, what errors are not obviated in it, and to that end [or and] that there be a review of the Articles of England and Ireland, it was

Resolved upon the Q., There shall be no Committee to consider the reviewing of the Articles, what errors are not obviated in them."[44]

Warfield was of the opinion that the purpose of this committee would have been to deal with any and all errors in the *Thirty-Nine Articles* or in the *Irish Articles* of 1615. Of course, since the committee was never formed, it is impossible to say with certainty what the purpose would have been. However, such a task is not at all evident in either minuted version of the resolution.[45] What seems far more likely to this writer is that it was proposed that there may be some errors that had arisen in the church during the history prior to the Assembly that either were not addressed by the previous Confessions or were not addressed by them adequately.

From September 21, 1646, through December 4 of that year, Dr. Cornelius Burges transcribed the final draft of the *Confession of Faith* chapter by chapter as it passed the Assembly. Dr. Burges' transcript amounted to a third scrutiny of the *Confession*.[46] The Assembly seemed quite satisfied with the third pass, for on December 10, 1646, it was "*Ordered* - That the Scribes take care of the exact printing of the Confession of Faith."[47]

All that remained to add to the *Confession* after that point were the "proof-texts." The Assembly undertook the task somewhat reluctantly as it was regarded by some as simply one more delaying tactic by "the retarding party."[48] Baillie noted in his journal on January 26, 1646/1647, "This innovation of our opposites may weell cost the Assemblie some time, who cannot doe the most easie things with any expedition; but it will be for the advantage and strength of the work."[49] So then, on January 6, 1646/47, the *Minutes* explain, "*Ordered* — That Mr. Wilson, Mr. Byfield, Mr. Gower, be a Committee to prepare Scriptures for the Confession of

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[38] *Shaw,* I, 358.

[39] *Minutes,* 80-81, note 1; *Shaw,* I, 257 ff; *Warfield,* 84-85. The letter read in part, "And it is with no less zeal and earnestness desired and expected by that whole Kirk and kingdom, that the remanent parts of Uniformity be expedited, especiallly that the materials of Kirk Government, which hath been so long in the hands of the Assembly of Divines, may be formed into a practical Directory with all possible diligence, which, beside the Uniformity longed for by all the Reformed Kirks, especially the Kirk of Scotland, will be a hedge and fence to the Directory of Worship...."

[40] *Minutes,* 83.

[41] *Ibid.,* 90.

[42] *Shaw,* I, 358.

[43] See *Warfield,* 86-96.

[44] *Minutes,* p. 286.

[45] *Warfield,* 100-101; *Minutes,* 286. Another entry in fascicle III of volume III of the folio minutes reads, "A new Committee to consider of all the errors unobviated in several Confessions of England, Ireland, and Scotland, to give in the catalogue of those errors to the Committee for the wording. R — No Committee to consider of the reviewing Articles what errors are not obviated in them." *Minutes,* 286, n.3.

[46] See *Minutes* for the period, i.e. pp. 286-308. It seems from the wording of the *Minutes* on Sept. 21 that Dr. Burges had already undertaken the task of transcription, but there is no mention of it in the *Minutes* until Sept. 21. Since Dr. Burges was on the Committee for the wording of the *Confession*, it is possible that he was simply reporting for the Committee.

[47] *Minutes,* 310. Mitchell notes in the *Minutes* that the House of Commons directed the Assembly to print 600 copies "for the service of the two Houses and of the Assembly," 310., n. 1.

[48] *Baillie,* ii, 403.

[49] *Ibid.,* iii, 2.

Faith."[50] The *Confession* with its proof texts in final form was presented to Parliament on April 29, 1647.[51] Thus the most complete and precise confession of the Protestant Reformation reached its final form and the advice of the Assembly of Divines to Parliament became the Confessional Standard of the English-speaking Presbyterian Churches since that day.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the historical overview of the Westminster Assembly's documents we set forth many of the historical, epistemological and hermeneutical considerations that came to bear upon the Westminster Assembly and its work. In the more recent portions of the thesis we examined how some of those considerations resulted in the Westminster documents. Hopefully the relevance of these documents for modern day Presbyterians has been seen as well.

The Puritans of the Westminster Assembly struggled with virtually the same difficulties that face the church today. They ministered to a generation that took the Reformation of the previous century for granted. Today's church must also minister to a generation that has forgotten many or most of its roots. In large measure both their generation and ours deal with men — even men in the ministry — who "take their ease in Zion" and prefer broadness and inclusion to precision and truth.

Jesus accused the church leaders of his day of a strange sort of hypocrisy: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets" (Matthew 23:29-30). In these years which comprise the 350th anniversary of the sitting of the Westminster Assembly we have a similar hypocrisy within most of our Presbyterian denominations.

Many today honor the Westminster Assembly with their lips, but their hearts are far from the religion of the Westminster divines. The Westminster Assembly spoke of a uniform confession based on Scripture alone; they spoke of a form of church government that must find its parameters and form in Scripture alone; they spoke of spiritual worship based upon the truth of Scripture alone. Today's church, however, generally bases its idea of unity upon doing the same thing rather than on speaking the same thing or believing the same thing.

Historic Presbyterianism does not claim the same place

for the Westminster Standards that it claims for Scripture. Presbyterianism does not even claim the same place for its standards that some claim for their denominational writings.[52] Rather, confessional Presbyterians maintain that a church is united by what it confesses. They maintain that the Westminster standards contain the doctrine that is taught in Scripture; *viz.* the Reformed faith. A departure from the Westminster *Confession of Faith* is, to the extent of the departure, a departure from the Reformed faith. A departure from the *Form of Government* is, to that extent, a departure from Presbyterianism. A departure from the *Directory for the Public Worship of God* is, to that extent, a departure from Reformed worship.

When modern Christian preachers restore the prophetic function of the church; when Presbyterian pastors again call for God's people to repent; when the churches once more take seriously their biblical mandate; they will be in a position to build upon the work of the Westminster Assembly. Most today who claim that they want to build upon the progress of Westminster actually want to undo the progress of Westminister. Evangelical leaders today are calling upon Evangelicals to stop "proselytizing" Roman Catholics.[53] Evangelical and supposedly Reformed churches send troubled people to psychoanalysts. Churches find they must create greater and greater forms of entertainment in order to "satisfy the flock."

What is needed is, indeed, a new Reformation. But when God sends that new Reformation, it is this writer's opinion that it will closely resemble the work done by the Westminster divines. We have their documents — what we lack is the boldness to put them into practice.

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[50] *Minutes,* 318-319.

[51] *Minutes,* 354, n. 1.

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[52] Many modern cults such as Latter Day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses and others claim virtual inspiration for their founders' writings.

[53] A paper prepared in January, 1994, by Charles Colson *et al.* entitled "Evangelicals and Roman Catholics Together."

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